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NEWS RELEASE

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The Nation's Report Card: Rhode Island science results improve

Rhode Island middle-school students improved significantly on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in science and are now at the national average for percentage of students who achieved proficiency.

The results from NAEP, sometimes called "The Nation's Report Card," which the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released today (May 10), show that 31 percent of Rhode Island grade-8 students attained the Proficient level in science, up 5 percentage points from the previous report card and matching the national average. The percent of Rhode Island grade-8 students at or above the Basic level in science was 63 percent, up 4 points from the previous report card and one point below the national average.

Rhode Island is one of only 16 states to improve since the previous assessment, which was administered in 2009.

Despite the improvement, Rhode Island remains the lowest-scoring of the six New England states and Rhode Island has some of the widest achievement gaps in the country. Only six states have a wider achievement gap between white and black students, only one state has a wider gap between white and Hispanic students, and only two states have a wider gap between non-poverty students and students living in poverty.

"Though I am pleased that our eighth graders have improved in science achievement and have met the national average for the first time, we need to see higher levels of achievement if our students are to be prepared for success," said George D. Caruolo, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education.

"I congratulate Rhode Island students and science educators for the progress we have made, but I am concerned about the wide achievement gaps that persist in Rhode Island, including the lowest scores in the country among English learners," said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "As we saw last year from the results of our state assessment, some schools and districts across the state have focused on science and have made

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significant progress. Students from all schools and all backgrounds can meet the demands of science instruction, and we will continue to support our teachers and students as they strive for excellence in science.”

To advance achievement in science, the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) works directly with districts to help educators align science instruction and curricula with the state science standards and to use science assessment results to improve instruction. Funds from the Rhode Island Race to the Top federal grant support statewide initiatives to advance student achievement in science. Rhode Island is also one of the lead states in a national partnership that is designing and developing the Next Generation Science Standards.

Several other ongoing initiatives in Rhode Island, such as GEMS-NET, Project ARISE, and the RITES project, provide teachers with opportunities for further professional development to improve science instruction.

The 2011 NAEP results released today closely match the results of the 2011 state assessments (NECAP), which showed 32 percent of Rhode Island students had attained proficiency in science, an improvement of 3 percentage points from the previous year.

A selected sample of about 2,300 8th-grade students from across the state took the NAEP science test from January through March of 2011. The NCES releases statewide results only; it releases no results at the school or district level. The assessment content areas are physical science, life science, and earth & space science.

The NCES, which is a division of the U.S. Department of Education, defines the Basic scoring level as “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work.” Students at the Proficient level “have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.”

RIDE will post further information on the Rhode Island NAEP scores on the RIDE website:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/naep.aspx>

The NCES has posted information about the NAEP science results on its site:

<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>

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